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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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ALBINO SQUIRREL STARTED WAR

One authority on Canadian place names traces the origin of Restigouche, river and county in New Brunswick and familiar as the name of a famous salmon, to the Micmac word "Listogotig," meaning "the scene of the great quarrel about the squirrel." In remoter days, says tradition, the Micmac and Mohawk Indians met beside the Restigouche river in friendly council. Children of both tribes were at play during the speech-making hours and captured a white (albino) squirrel. A quarrel arose over the possession of this rarity, the braves of both tribes intervened on behalf of their respective youngsters, and the dispute quickly degenerated into open warfare. For forty years thereafter, it is said, the Micmacs and Mohawks continued this war that started over the ownership of a white squirrel. All through human history albino animals of accidental occurrence in many species have been a source of wonder and fascination. They still are. One of the most popular exhibits at the Royal Ontario Museum is a large collection of albino specimens. Not only a white squirrel is shown, but snow-white birds from the crow to peacock, loon and house sparrow, besides many furry creatures normally of dusky hue, who masqueraded in white because of an accidental pigment deficiency in their body chemistry.

APRIL EXHIBITIONS

The Canadian Handicrafts Guild of Ontario, through the co-operation of various craft groups including the Spinners and Weavers of Ontario, the Canadian Guild of Potters, the Metalworkers, the Woodworkers, and the Toronto Branch of the Ukranian Women's Association of Canada, has assembled three travelling exhibits to stimulate an interest in the crafts and to raise the standard of production.

On display in the New Acquisition Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum from April 1st to 20th, these exhibits have been designed to meet different needs. The large travelling exhibit, providing a general survey of the crafts, fits into two large packing cases. Instructional exhibits, mounted on trays which fit into trunks are divided into three sections: spinning and weaving, metalworking and woodworking, and pottery. This exhibit may be borrowed as a whole or in part. The third form of exhibit is a small portable one, mounted on five small trays, useful where display room is limited.

These exhibits may be borrowed by writing to the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, 332 Bloor St. W., Toronto 5.

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The Toronto Aquarium Society will hold its annual display of living tropical fish from April 1st to 13th in the Zoology Art Alcove of the Royal Ontario Museum.

OWLS, MICE, AND MATHEMATICS

Ground sufficient to produce ten tons of grass will support 1,000 field mice with a total weight of about 65 pounds. An owl weighing half a pound or so can devour 1,000 mice in one season. Owls obligingly count their own mouse consumption by means of regurgitated pellets containing the skeletal remains of the rodents, neatly packed in an envelope of fragmentary fur. Owls of all species, their pellets and the tiny bones enclosed therein, make a striking display at the Royal Ontario Museum.

WOMAN'S CROWNING GLORY

Originally woman's crowning glory was undoubtedly her hair, but for centuries it has been her hat. This article of clothing or accessory of dress has been fashioned in the greater variety of shapes, sizes, and substances than any other item of apparel, and a glance at the past is enough to assure us that history rarely repeats itself when it comes to hats. An early 16th century tapestry in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology reveals that each of the twenty or more women depicted in it is wearing a different hat or headdress.

Then, as now, they were a means of expressing one's individuality, but if, after looking in hat-shop windows, some of you think this form of expression is being carried too far, just turn back the pages of the history of fashion to the 18th century. There, particularly in France, we find fantastic hats beyond our wildest dreams. Novelty beyond anything else was the desire of the fashionable French lady and the milliners sought to please. This they achieved, as may be seen in drawing and paintings of that period. Historic events, incidents of current interest, and even a popular song were enough to inspire new creations in hats. The "piece de resistance" of the period was one commemorating the courageous action of a ship in a battle against the English in 1778. It consisted of a ship in full sail complete in detail, which was balanced precariously on an elaborate coiffure.

Coming down to the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Royal Ontario Museum's collection of hats and bonnets does little to shake the evidence that variety is the spice of life. From the dainty little bonnets of the mid 19th century with their laces and ribbons, to the large hats of the early 20th laden with flowers and feathers they were, just as the hats of today, masterpieces of the milliner's art and ingenuity, and the joy of the women who wore them, as their crowning glory.

"BLUE ROBINS" ARE HERE

Charles Fothergill, one of Ontario's pioneer naturalists who came to York (Toronto) from York, England, in 1817, left valuable manuscripts and diaries, some of which are now housed in the Royal Ontario Museum. He had no "bird guides" to consult, and had to create the names for many species new to him: James L. Baillie of the Museum staff notes that some of those names were singularly apt. Among them was "Blue Robin," given to the Eastern Bluebird and which describes that popular, blue-coated, red-vested songster now arriving from the south, perfectly.